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AUTHOR Hsu, Mei-Ling
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ABSTRACT

This research review explores the propaganda model proposed by E. S. Herman and N. Chomsky (1988) as an alternative way of looking at the American news media. The study begins with a review of the theoretical assumptions and the supporting empirical findings highlighting the propaganda framework, following which is a synthesis of research literature in relation to Herman and Chomsky's model from the perspectives of ideological mobilization and of journalistic routines. The review also discusses the strengths and drawbacks of the criticisms of the model, drawing attention to the inherent weaknesses of the propaganda assumptions. Further, the review discusses implications for studying foreign affairs coverage in the U.S. news media, and presents a set of suggestions as to how future research in this area can be conducted. Five notes are included, and 51 references are attached. (SR)

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PACKAGING THE NEWS: PROPAGANDA MODEL REVISITED AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS COVERAGE

Mei-Ling Hsu

Interdepartmental Doctoral Program
of Mass Communication
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
U.S.A.
Phone: (313) 764-7394

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the *propaganda model* proposed by Herman and Chomsky as an alternative way of looking at the American news media. The study begins with a review of the theoretical assumptions and the supporting empirical findings highlighting the propaganda framework. Following is a synthesis of research literature in relation to Herman and Chomsky's model from the perspectives of ideological mobilization and of journalistic routines. The study also discusses the strengths and drawbacks of the criticisms of the model, drawing attention to the inherent weaknesses of the propaganda assumptions. To advance one step further, the study looks for the implications for studying the foreign affairs coverage in the American news media. A set of suggestions as to how future research in this area can be conducted are presented to conclude the study.

PACKAGING THE NEWS: PROPAGANDA MODEL REVISITED AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS COVERAGE

Introduction

Coverage of foreign news events in the American news media has long been a question that raises theoretical and policy concerns. While a great deal of attention has been paid to the contents of foreign affairs coverage, few efforts have been devoted to the *processes* that generate the patterns of the coverage. After their years of studying the political economy of the mass media, Herman and Chomsky (Herman. 1986; Herman and Chomsky, 1988) argue that the primary function of the mass media of the United States is to mobilize public support for the special interests that dominate the government and the private sector. They propose a propaganda model as an alternative way of looking at the workings of the news media. Such an assumption seemingly differs from the free press belief that the media are independent and committed to discovering and reporting the truth. It also contradicts what leaders of the media claim that their news judgments rest on unbiased, objective criteria. However, in view of the fact that the American news media tend to focus on certain issues (e.g. disaster, war, and violent riots) in certain regions of the world (e.g. Soviet Union, Middle East, Central America, and more recently, Eastern Europe), the propaganda aspect of the overall news service cannot be overlooked.

But the first intriguing question is: What are the underlying forces that make a propaganda model feasible in the liberal capitalist societies like the U.S.? Herman and Chomsky (1988) identify five crucial elements in a propaganda model: 1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; 2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; 3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; 4) "flaks"[1] as a means of disciplining the media; and 5) "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism. These five elements serve as *filters* to narrow the range of news that passses through the gates, and even more sharply limit what can become "big news." A close examiniation of these five elements reveals that the economic factors such as media ownership and advertising revenues, and anticommunism have deep roots in the dominant capitalist ideologies. On the other hand, the reliance of the news media on the official

sources as well as what Herman and Chomsky call "flaks" can be attributed to the journalistic routines and constraints which, in turn, facilitate the main power foci within and through the mass media to mobilize bias.

Thus, the present study is an effort to synthesize the literature related to the propaganda model. Following a summary of Herman and Chomsky's theoretical framework and the evidence supporting their assumptions, this paper will re-examine the propaganda model from the perspectives of the ideological mobilization and the practice of journalistic routines. It then will review critiques of the model in relation to these two perspectives. Moreover, the paper will discuss the implications of a propaganda model for the foreign affairs coverage in the American news media. Suggestions as to how future research can be conducted in this area will be addressed to conclude the paper.

The Propaganda Framework

As mentioned earlier, the propaganda model proposed by Herman and Chomsky is an alternative way of interpreting the performance of the American news media. The model is called *propaganda* because it lends itself to "analyzing the numerous and important cases where the mass media serve as instruments in campaigns of ideological mobilization" (Herman, 1986). At first sight, the term *propaganda* implies a system at work in countries where there is monopolistic control and official censorship over the media. Quite to the contrary, the propaganda model advocated by Herman and Chomsky is said to operate in countries where the media are private and formal censorship is absent, such as the U.S.

The special importance of a propaganda model lies in what Lippmann (1921) referred to as the *manufacture of consent*. Put in Herman and Chomsky's words, the propaganda campaigns:

> "...address the main drift in the building of consensus and ideology rather than the individual episodes of struggle over a particular story and the exceptions at the margins." (Herman, 1986:176)

Therefore, reports of the abuses of worthy victims not only pass through the filters; they may also become the basis of sustained propaganda campaigns. This was true, for example, of the shooting down by the Soviets of the Korean airliner KAL 007 in early September 1983, which permitted an extended campaign of denigration of an official enemy and greatly advanced Reagan administration arms plan (ibid.). Conversely, propaganda campaigns will not be mobilized where victimization, even though massive,

sustained, and dramatic, fails to meet the test of utility of elite interests. Thus, in sharp contrast, the shooting down by Israel of a Libyan civilian airliner in February 1973 led to no outcry in the West, no denunciations for "cold-blooded murder," and no boycott (Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

The news coverage of Central America is also a significant case for testing this perspective. Consider the coverage from and about Nicaragua, under attack by the U.S. In this instance, the division of elite opinion is sufficiently great to allow it to be questioned whether sponsorship of a terrorist army is effective in making Nicaragua "more democratic" and "less of a threat to its neighbors". However, Herman and Chomsky's (1988) study shows that the mass media rarely allow their news columns or their opinion pages to present materials suggesting that Nicaragua is more democratic than El Salvador and Guatemala;[2] that its government does not murder ordinary citizens, as the governments of El Salvador and Guatemala do on a routine basis; that it has carried out socioeconomic reforms important to the majority that the other two governments cannot attempt; that Nicaragua poses no military threat to its neighbors but has, in fact, been subject to continuous attack by the U.S. and its clients and surrogates; and that the U.S. fear of the Nicaraguan government is based more on its virtues than on its alleged defects. In contrast, El Salvador and Guatemala, with far worse records, are presented as struggling toward democracy under *moderate* leaders, thus meriting sympathetic approval.

These examples show that the media's adherence to the state propaganda line is functional. Just as the government of Guatemala could kill scores of thousands without major repercussion because the media recognized that these were *unworthy* victims, so aid to state terrorists in El Salvador and Guatemala, and the funding of contra attacks on *soft targets* in Nicaragua, depend heavily on continued media of *worth* and an appropriate legitimization and delegitimization.

In sum, Herman and Chomsky's propaganda approach to media coverage suggests a systematic and highly political dichotomization in news coverage based on serviceability to important domestic power interests. This is observable not only in the news media's choices and volume of stories, but also in the quality of coverage, i.e., the attention given to a fact —its placement, tone, context, and fullness of treatment.

Re-examination of the Model

1. Propaganda as a Process of Ideological Mobilization

Although the use of the term *propaganda* is fairly recent, the basic assumptions of this model can be found in the developments of the Gramscian (1971) idea of *hegemony* and the discussion of *media frames*. This section will analyze these two perspectives in relation to Herman and Chomsky's proposed framework.

Media Hegemony

In explaining mass media performance, the propaganda model uses an approach closer to a *free market* analysis, with the results largely an outcome of the workings of market force (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). In the same vein, Gramsci used the concept of hegemony to describe and analyze how modern capitalist societies were organized, or aimed to be organized, in the past and present. Briefly, he argued that:

> "[P]olitical power in liberal capitalist societies depends relatively little, except in times of extreme crisis, on the coercive apparatus of the state. It rests instead on the strength of a world view, a system of assumptions and social values accepted as *common sense* which legitimates the existing distribution of power and...renders opposition to it inconceivable for most of the population." (Hallin, 1987:4)

A society which has a hegemonic world-view is one in which a relatively coherent philosophy is shared by the ruling groups and by all major groups composing the society. Gramsci further identified three major terms which form the baseline for the conceptualization of hegemony. These three terms are the *economic*, the *state*, and *civil society*.[3] More recently, Williams has transcended the classical Marxist base-superstructure dichotomy. He has proposed a notion of hegemony as not only the articulate upper level of ideology, but a whole reality for most people in society (Williams, 1973 and 1977). Hegemony, then, cannot be won in the productive and economic sphere alone: it must be organized at the level of the state, politics and the superstructures of religion, politics, the arts, law or education (Hall, 1979). This is what Althusser (1971) calls *ideological state apparatuses*. In other words, the hegemonic approach assumes that in the liberal capitalist societies, the dominant economic class does not, for the most part, produce and disseminate ideology directly. The task is left to the private, autonomous, and in many cases *nonpolitical* institutions: the family, the church, the political party, and of course, the mass media (Gitlin, 1979; Hallin, 1987). Nevertheless, the economic system routinely generates, encourages, and tolerates ideologies which challenge and alter its own

rationale. But contradictions of this sort operate within a hegemonic framework which bounds and narrows the range of actual and potential contending world views (Bocock, 1986).

In the study of the media, hegemony plays a double role. First, it is used to conceptualize the political *function* of the media. In the case of the U.S., the hegemonic approach suggests that the media owners have a vested interest in seeing the status quo continue, because they are part of the U.S. power structure, the top positions in the institutional structure of the society (Bocock, 1986). At the same time, the concept of hegemony is employed to explain the *behavior* of the media, the process of cultural production itself (Hallin, 1987).

The hegemonic assumptions, though not explicit, are well revealed in Herman and Chomsky's contention. According to their propaganda framework, views challenging fundamental premises will be excluded from the mass media even when elite controversy over tactics rages fiercely. The diversity of news, as discussed frequently in studies of newsrooms and of gatekeepers, is only meaningful in the context of individual incidents or media, rather than in a frame of larger power aggregates or ideological patterns in which news plays an important role (Herman, 1985). For instance, in their case studies of the media campaigns involving events in Cambodia and East Timor, and elections in the Central America, Herman and Chomsky show that the dissident voices in the U.S. were not available in any of the major media (Chomsky and Herman, 1979a and 1979b; Herman, 1982).

However, sometimes omissions and suppressions are not enough, and the press lends itself to the dissemination of outright lies. One way to lie, as pointed out by Parenti (1986), is to accept at face value what are known to be lies, passing them on to the public without adequate countervailing response. Parenti's view might seem a little radical, but it does explain how the dominant ideology shapes the production of news and entertainment and why the media can be expected to function as agents of legitimation, despite the fact that they are independent of direct political control. As a consequence, although the media tend to criticize the status quo to a certain extent, and to establish their own legitimacy as news organizations, the criticism will never be harsh enough to seriously threaten or change the status quo.

Media Frames

The hegemonic process can also find its parallel in the discussion of *media frames*, as mentioned by Tuchman (1978), Gitlin (1980), Parenti (1986), Gamson (1988) and several others. The concept of *framing* can first be attributed to Goffman (1974), who defines *frames* as principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters. Similarly, a frame can be considered to be the core of a set of interpretive packages for making sense of an issue and the public events that affect it (Gamson, 1988). Many policy debates take for granted a common frame. It is characteristic of frames that they are the least accessible part of a package, typically rendered implicitly rather than articulated directly. In other words, the frame suggests what the issue is about. It answers the question, "what is the basic source of controversy or concern on this issue?" Applying the concept of *framing* to the media presentation, Tuchman (1978) indicates that a media frame makes the world beyond direct experience look natural. Moreover, *media frames*, according to Gitlin (1980), largely unspoken and unacknowledged, organize the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports. This frame typically implies a range of positions, rather than any single one, allowing for a degree of controversy among those who share a common frame (Gamson, 1988). That is, there is ample room for disagreement within the overall frame. Even for organizational reasons alone, the use of frames are unavoidable. Frames enable journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely: to recognize it as information, to assign it to cognitive categories, and to package it for efficient relay to their audiences (Gitlin, 1980).

Among the framing advocates, Parenti (1986) appears to hold the most extreme view. He considers that the most effective (media) propaganda relies on framing rather than falsehood. However, Parenti's contention corresponds to what the propaganda model suggests as he puts it:

> "By bending the truth rather than breaking it, using emphasis, nuance, innuendo, and peripheral embellishments, communicators can create a desired impression without resorting to explicit advocacy and without departing too far from the appearance of objectivity." (p. 220)

One common framing method is to select labels and other vocabulary designed to convey politically loaded images. These labels and phrases, like the masks in a Greek drama or Chinese opera, convey positive or negative cues regarding events and persona, often without benefit of — and usually as a substitute for — supportive information (ibid.). The following two examples best illustrate this point:

– A news story in the *Los Angeles Times* described Nicaraguan leader Danniel Ortega's denunciation of U.S. policy as being "as strident as ever," implying that Ortega was given to excessive and unjustified attacks (*Los Angeles Times*, October 6, 1984). The report said nothing about U.S. policy itself or about the content of Ortega's criticism-which readers might not have found "strident."

– A report in the *Washington Post* described a province in El Salvador as "guerrilla-infested," rather than "guerrilla-controlled" or "prorevolutionary," thereby reducing the insurgent populace to a kind of lice (*Washington Post*, October 25, 1984).

In short, framing is achieved in the way news is packaged, the amount of exposure, the placement (front page or back, lead story or last), the tone of presentation (symbolic or slighting), the accompanying headlines and visual effects, and the labeling and vocabulary. Such assumptions are similar to Herman and Chomsky's approach to studying media coverage, as mentioned earlier in the paper.

2. Propaganda as a Process of Journalistic Routines

The hegemonic process and the framing methods discussed in the previous section seem to suggest that there is some kind of conspiracy between the news media and the powerful groups. Evidence from the studies of journalistic routines, however, demonstrates that such a hegemonic process operates effectively outside consciousness. That is, it is exercised by self-conceived professionals working with a great deal of autonomy within institutions that proclaim the neutral goal of informing the public. Normally the dominant frames are taken for granted by media practioners, and reproduced and defended by them for reasons, and via practices, which the practioners do not conceive to be hegemonic (Gitlin, 1980).

But what are the journalistic routines that facilitate the workings of the dominant frames? With regard to Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model, two types of journalistic routines are particularly crucial: *news judgments* and *press-official source relationship*.

News Judgments

The work of ideological mobilization consists of imposing standardized assumptions over events and conditions that must be covered by the dictates of the prevailing news values. Values enter the news most pervasively in the form of reality judgments, the assumptions about external reality associated with the concepts which journalists use to grasp it. In Gans's (1980) study of the four news media: *CBS Evening News*, *NBC Nightly News*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*, it is shown that the journalists cannot exercise news judgment without a composite of nation, society, and national and social institutions in their

collective heads, and this picture is an aggregate of reality judgments. Furthermore, the editors and reporters in the news media are generally upper-middle-class[4] in origin, and although their personal values may be liberal by the conventional nomenclature of American politics, they tend to share the core hegemonic assumptions of their class: that is, of their managers as well as their major sources (Gans, 1980; Johnstone et al, 1976).

The values that enter news judgments regularly and most often are those what Gans (1980) calls enduring values: ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, modernism, social order, and national leadership. The enduring values are included unconsciously because they are built into important judgments. As a result, they do not conflict with objectivity. In fact, they make it possible. Being part of news judgment, the enduring values are those of journalism rather than of journalists; consequently, journalists can feel detached and need not bring in their personal values.

In short, journalists' values are anchored in routines that are at once steady enough to sustain hegemonic principles and flexible enough to absorb many new facts. These routines are bounded by perceptions of the audience's common sense and are finally accountable to the world views of top managers and owners. These factors shape the news. Everyday frames and procedures suffice to sustain the legitimacy of the economic-political system as a whole.

Press-Official Source Relationship

Another major journalistic routine that shapes the propaganda framework is closely tied to the symbiotic relationship between the news media and the powerful sources of information, mostly government agencies and politicians. Sigal (1973) analyzed the origin of 2,850 domestic and foreign stories that appeared in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* and found that public officials were the source of 78% of the stories.

Herman's (1985) study of the *New York Times* coverage of the El Salvador election of 1984 also shows that there was heavy reliance on U.S. and Salvadoran officials, who comprised 80% of all sources cited. The main exception is the government of enemy states, whose pronouncements are normally neither sought out nor taken at face value. Similarly, a recent study of the ABC News *Nightline*, a preeminent public affairs program in the U.S., finds that 80% of the guests are from the elite (profressionals, government or corporate representatives), while only about 6% represented public interest groups (peace, civil liberties, environment, civil rights, labor) (Hornes, and Croteau, 1989).

In brief, the official sources go on setting unspoken outer limits for the routines that journalists are trained for and believe in. Once hired and assigned, reporters customarily form strong bonds with the sources (especially in the Washington D.C.) on whom they depend for stories. They thus absorb the world views of the powerful.

A number of other studies have documented the factors contributing to such interdependence (Gans, 1980; Martin, 1981; Graber, 1984; Hess, 1984; Guzzardi, 1985; Herman and Chomsky, 1988). To begin with, the news media are drawn into the relationship with the powerful groups due to economic necessity and reciprocity of interest. As stressed by Herman and Chomsky (1988), the media need a steady, reliable flow of the raw material of news. They have daily news demands and imperative news schedules that they must meet. They cannot afford to have reporters and cameras at all places where important stories may break. Therefore, the White House, the Pentagon, the State Department, and the large corporate bureaucracies become the central resources of the significant news activities. Sigal (1973) points out that the benefit is both direct — in that the news can be sold — and indirect, in that government agencies *dig out* much of the news for reporters and give it to them free. Gans (1980) voices the same contention as he indicates that the powerful sources are the most easily and quickly available, as well as the most reliable and productive, source of news. It should also be noted that there is reciprocity by the reliance on the official sources. As pointed out by Cohen (1963), the reporter can advance some of his/her policy or personal goals by capitalizing on the *newsworthiness* of policy-making officials.

Another reason for the heavy weight given to official of the news is that the news media claim to be "objective" dispenser of the news. Partly to maintain the image of objectivity, but also to protect themselves from criticisms of bias and the threat of libel suits, the news media need material that can be portrayed as presumptively accurate (Tuchman, 1972). As stressed by Cohen (1963), the more *neutral* the press is, the more easily it lends itself to the uses of others, particularly to public officials whom reporters have come to regard as prime sources of news.

However, sources alone do not determine the news, but they go a long way in focusing the journalists' attention on the aspect of social order (Gans, 1980). Neither do sources alone determine the values in the news, but their values are implicit in the information they provide. Journalists do not, by any means, parrot these values, but being objective and detached, they do not rebut them either.

In a word, through the processes of the aforementioned journalistic routines, the owners and managers of the major media are, according to Gitlin (1980), committed to private property relations which honor the prerogatives of capital; committed to a national security State; committed to reform of selected violations of the moral code through selective action by State Agencies; and committed to approving individual success within corporate and bureaucratic structures. The orderly format ends up promoting socical stability: a sense of whatever is wrong in the world; and it can be put right by authoritative agencies. Even if the story is about disorder, it likely turns to the restoration of order by the public officials (Gans, 1980). Content that starts out seeming threatening — a mass demonstration, a riot, a new style of political deviance — may thus end up confirming the inherent rightness and necessity of the core ideologies.

Criticisms of the Propaganda Framework

What the propaganda framework emphasizes is a critical task of using an institutional level of analysis. However, attention to placing newswork and news content in a broader context has some empirical shortcomings which have been criticized by scholars of various communication traditions. Among them, arguments focusing on the functions of the oppositional media and the ideological variations between the news media are the most challenging. This section will first analyze each of these assumptions, then point out the strengths and flaws of these criticisms in relation to the propaganda model. It is noteworthy that as the term *propaganda model* has only been used by Herman and Chomsky in recent years. Criticisms discussed in this section do not directly address the model itself, but the theoretical assumptions underlying its framework.

1. An Oppositional Media Perspective

Assumptions of the oppositional media have emerged in the late 1960s while there was a substantial increase in critical content in the American news media during the Vietnam War. This transformation, accordingly, is in large part responsible for the well-documented decline of public confidence in political institutions (Miller, 1974; Lipset and Schneider, 1983) and, more generally, for a weakening of political authority (Miller, et al., 1979). As Huntington (1975) indicates,

> "The most notable new source of national power in 1970, as compared to 1950, was the national media...In the 1960's the network organizations...became a highly creditable, never-tiring political opposition, a maverick third party which never need face the sobering experience of governing." (pp. 98-99)

Even the officials sometimes complain of the diplomatic damage done by the oppositional media. The most cited case is the disclosure of the Pentagon Papers by the *New York Times*. However, as the Papers were about the bombing of Cambodia in 1969, an action that had already happened, the courts concluded that the government had been unable to show evidence of harm to national security. In other words, the news media, though oppositional, did not go too far as to challenge the premises of the dominant ideologies. But even when there are conflicts of policy between reporters and sources, or reporters and editors, or editors and publishers, these conflicts are played out within a field of terms of premises which does not overstep the hegemonic boundary. Mostly, official assumptions are taken for granted, and there is a tendency to fall into official definitions of an issue. Even when the official assumptions are challenged by sponsors of alternative packages, it is these competitors who carry the burden of proof. At least, as Gamson and Modigliani argue (1987), journalists make official packages the starting point for discussing an issue. The fact of the popularity of the oppositional media is that the late sixties were a time when political crisis itself became routine. Therefore, the news media merely reflected the social change rather than challenged the shared consensus.

2. Ideological Variations

The assumption of ideological mobilization in the propaganda framework has also been criticized for ignoring the individual ideological variations among those who finance the media. As Shoemaker (1987) puts it, broad-scale sociological theories, as advocated in the propaganda framework, are inherently difficult to test on a social system level. Using the social system as the unit of analysis assumes less variance within a social system than between systems, an assumption which may not be valid. Altschull (1984) assumes that ideology can be conceptualized on more than one level of analysis. He uses ideology as a criterion variable which may describe whether differences between the systems are greater than differences within the systems — a classic analysis of variance approach.

To account for the ideological variations mentioned in the foregoing arguments, Altheide (1984) holds that the critical question is whether journalistic work routines are sufficiently influenced by a dominant mode of thought to negate any journalistic independence. He contends that the strength of the media hegemony position requires an assessment of the orientation and practice of journalists, because both establishment and anti-establishment organizations operate bureaucratically. Thus, the ideological content of news reports based on such sources will also vary. Similarly, Pollock and Guidette (1980) maintain that informal elite networks demonstrate more flexibility than suggested by

either a reflexive representaton of a country's relative hegemony in the international economic order or a rigid commitment to ideological polarization. To summarize, arguments advocating ideological variations among the news media suggest that if the ideological influences within a nation exerting hegemonic control are diverse and not homogeneous, then we would expect measurements of ideological influence using the nation as the unit of analysis to miss this intra-nation diversity and to contribute to null findings using such variables. Therefore, to arrive at a more testable theory, the focus should be shifted from the nation as the unit of ideological study to the ideology of those who finance the media – a variable which can be measured within and across nations.

However, one major question remains unanswered in the preceding assumptions that oppose the use of an institutional level of analysis. Most of these studies do not distinguish between criticisms directed at individuals and at institutions. Their evaluative criteria of the ideological variations are only based on the text of the news content to assess whether it is favorable or unfavorable. Yet ideology is not something that can be read *in* news content. A closer examination of Miller et al's (1979) study, as mentioned earlier, reveals that although the data demonstrate a considerable variations between news content, most of the criticisms were directed at individuals rather than at institutions and that most came from other political authorities rather than from journalists. Hallin's (1986b) analysis of the news coverage of the Vietnam War offers a further explanation to the claimed ideological variations. He states that:

> "The profession of journalism has not one but many different sets of standards and procedures, each applied in different kinds of political situations...In situations where political consensus seems to prevail, journalists tend to act as *responsible* members of the political establishment...In situations of political conflict, they become more detached or even adversarial, though they normally will stay well within the boounds of the debate going on within the political *establishment...*" (p. 10)

Despite the flaws found in the assumptions of the oppositional media as well as of ideological variations, the aforementioned criticisms have indeed, directly and indirectly, identified three major weaknesses inherent in the propaganda framework. First, the term *propaganda* itself is value-laden, suggesting biased viewpoints from the news media. Hackett (1984) holds that the concept of *bias* should be replaced by *structured orientation* so that we can avoid being sidetracked by the search for balance and nondistortion and focus on factors shaping the media's functioning as an ideological institution. Moreover, the propaganda framework does not systematically tackle the issue that under what conditions would the media identify the news as *crisis* or *conflict*. Evidence from Herman and Chomsky's model seems to center on foreign affairs issues, which have been described as *crises* most of the time. It suggests that the dominant ideology is best

propagated in the foreign affairs news. Last but not least, the propaganda assumptions tend to treat *ideology* as static, thus overlooking the fact that change of the social systems might induce ideological change, and that journalistic reports have also contributed to numerous social changes. Such changes have not been readily acknowledged by both the media hegemonists and advocates of the propaganda framework.

Implications for Foreign Affairs Coverage

If we accept the assumption that a propaganda model works most efficiently in the media coverage of foreign affairs, the processes that generate such a model, as analyzed in this paper, have two significant implications. On the one hand, they would result in certain patterns in the selection and portrayal of foreign affairs news. On the other hand, the way that the news media present the stories might affect how the public perceive the issues. Using Rogers and Dearing's (1988) distinction, the propaganda framework shows the effects of the policy agenda on the media agenda, and implies the media agenda-setting effects on the public.

1. Effects of Policy Agenda on Media Agenda

The topics and tones in the foreign affairs coverage tend to reflect and promote the status quo and the interest of the dominant groups. A list of the following seven criteria for choosing foreign affairs news, as compiled by Gans (1980), can best illustrate the consistency between the topic selection and the enduring American values and ideologies. These criteria are: 1) American activities in foreign countries, particularly when presidents and secretaries of state visit there; 2) events that affect Americans directly in a major way; 3) relations of the U.S. with Communist countries; 4) foreign elections in other parts of the world if they involve a change in the head of state; 5) stories about dramatic political conflicts; 6) disasters, if they involve massive loss of lives and destruction of property; and 7) excesses of foreign dictators. Moreover, emphasis on violence, conflict and disaster is regarded as an appealing format of foreign affairs news (Graber, 1984). As far as the tones in the news are concerned, the news media generally accept official designations of who are America's friends and enemies and interpret their motives accordingly. When relationships change, media coverage mirrors the change too (Lent, 1977). More interestingly, to strike a balance between national security and public interest in depicting the changes, the news media tend to focus more on background and

human interest stories (Graber, 1984; Mishra, 1976). In any case, the policy agenda is treated as an independent variable in the news coverage of foreign affairs because the policy elites control most information sources and might be expected to set the agenda.

2. Media Agenda-Setting

The propaganda model does not impose an effect of the media agenda on the public agenda. It cannot be ruled out that public concern also determines what gets into the media agenda. However, unidirectional causality would occur for agenda items that are *unobstrusive* (Zucker, 1978); that is, events giving rise to issues with which people ordinarily have no direct experience, such as foreign affairs news. The less direct experience one has with an agenda issue, the more one must rely upon the mass media for information and an interpretation of the agenda issue. Put simply, lacking any competing information, we often unwarily embrace what we read or hear. The media, thus, are not merely reinforcing previously held opinion, they are implanting new ones. For example, millions of Americans who have an unfavorable view of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua came by that opinion through exposure to press reports rather than from direct contact with Nicaraguan revolution (Parenti, 1986). The negative view the media present is congruous with a long-standing and largely uncriticized anticommunist, cold-war propaganda that has shaped the climate of opinion for decades.

As to whether the negative view of the Sandinistas translates into support for a U.S. government policy of aggression against Nicaragua is yet another question. To put in the framework of the social construction of reality, as sketched out by Adoni and Mane (1984), the individual's subjective reality of foreign affairs is more remote than the individual's everyday life experiences, and is thus more likely to be affected by the symbolic social reality, in this case, the reports from the news media. Likewise, Iyengar (1987) suggests that personal experience is an important source of political agendas, and personal experience may make individuals more or less receptive to the media agenda. What the public takes for an agenda-setting effect can be nothing more than the media and public responding in concert to real-world events.

To sum up, for news about foreign affairs, which are remote from the public's experiences, it can be predicted that the news coverage does in some way determine the public agenda of the issues. In other words, the propaganda framework suggests that while there are limits on the general public's ability to think in a certain way, the mass media could be successful in telling the public what to think about in terms of the foriegn news events.

Conclusion

Herman and Chomsky developed a propaganda model as an alternative to the analysis of American news media. They consider the news media to be part of the political structure, functioning to mobilize the dominant ideology. To explore the assumptions that highlight the propaganda framework, this paper began with a review of Herman and Chomsky's model and the supporting empirical findings. However, rather than re-analyze the five crucial *filters* in this model, this paper has synthesized the research literature from the perspectives of ideological mobilization and journalistic routines. While the former perspective has deep roots in the Gramscian concept of hegemony as well as the media frames, the latter is closely tied to the news judgments of the journalists, and the relationship between the mass media and the official sources. Generally, the propaganda framework calls for an institutional level of analysis of the news content, but such an argument has been challenged by the advocates of oppositional media and of ideological variations. This study has identified the strengths and drawbacks of these criticisms, drawing attention to the inherent weaknesses of the propaganda assumptions.

To advance one step further, this study has discussed the implications for the news coverage of foreign affairs. Evidence from several studies showed that the policy agenda has induced some propaganda impact on the media agenda. Theories of the social construction of reality as well as media agenda-setting also suggest some potential propaganda effects of foreign news coverage on the public agenda.

Based on the arguments presented in this paper, it is notable that research dealing with news coverage of a single event or focusing on favorability of the news content is not sufficient to support the propaganda assumptions. That is, objectivity can not be taken as the opposite of ideology in the media, and ideology, in turn, can not be read *in* news content. To conclude, this paper proposes that research could proceed in the following directions:

1. Future research could look at the news coverage of two similar events and compare the criticisms raised: Who raises them, government officials or opposition? At whom are the criticisms directed, institutions, individuals, or even some inhuman forces?

2. Future research could compare news coverage of the same event between two or more countries to see how it is different in quality and quantity of coverage, as well as in the way the criticisms are raised.

3. Future research could focus on the news coverage of ideological change in the issue (e.g. foreign policy toward the Soviet Union) by a longitudinal study of several related events. It will also be interesting to examine the strategies used by the news media to mobilize consensus during the change.

4. To test the media-agenda setting effects, future research could, through longitudinal surveys, investigate whether the public agenda of foreign affairs corresponds to the media agenda over a period of time.

NOTES

1. Flaks, according to Herman and Chomsky (1988), refers to negative responses to a media statement or program. It may take the form of letters, telegrams, phone calls, petitions, lawsuits, speeches and bills before Congress, and other modes of complaint, threat, and punitive action. It may be organized centrally or locally, or it may consist of the entirely independent actions of individuals.

2. Elite disagreement over tactics in dealing with Nicaragua is reflected in public debate, but the mass media, in conformity with elite priorities, have coalesced in processing news in a way that fails to place U.S. policy into meaningful context, and that systematically suppresses evidence of U.S. violence and aggression while putting the Sandinistas in an extremely bad light.

3. The *economic* is term used to connote the dominant mode of production in a territory at a particular moment in time. The *state* consists of the means of violence (the police and armed forces) in a given territory, together with state-funded bureaucracies (the civil service, legal, welfare and educational institutions). The term *civil society* connotes the other organizations in a social formation which are neither part of the processes of material production in the economy, nor part of state-funded organizations, but which are relatively long-lasting institutions supported and run by people outside of the other two major spheres.

4. As Lichter and Rotheman's survey (1982 and 1983) and Gans' study have shown, only one in five journalists come from blue-collar or low-status white-collar families. Almost all have college degrees and a majority have attended graduate school. Despite journalism's reputation as a low-paid profession, most newspeople have family incomes that put them in the top 10 percent bracket.

5. As pointed out by Parenti (1986), most journalists are educated into a world view that supports rather than opposes the existing corporate system. Most journalism schools offer politically conventional curricula. Corporations and foundations have endowed journalism schools with courses and programs designed to make newspeople "more understanding" of the business viewpoint. For most journalists, who have only a feeble grasp of economics, such programs influence their perceptions.

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